

GEOGRAPHY SPOTLIGHT

Mapping the Oregon Trail

In 1841, Congress appropriated \$30,000 for a survey of the Oregon Trail and named John C. Frémont to head the expeditions. Frémont earned his nickname “the Pathfinder” by leading three expeditions—which included artists, scientists, and cartographers, among them the German-born cartographer Charles Preuss—to explore the American West between 1842 and 1848. When Frémont submitted the report of his first expedition, Congress immediately ordered the printing of 10,000 copies, which were widely distributed.

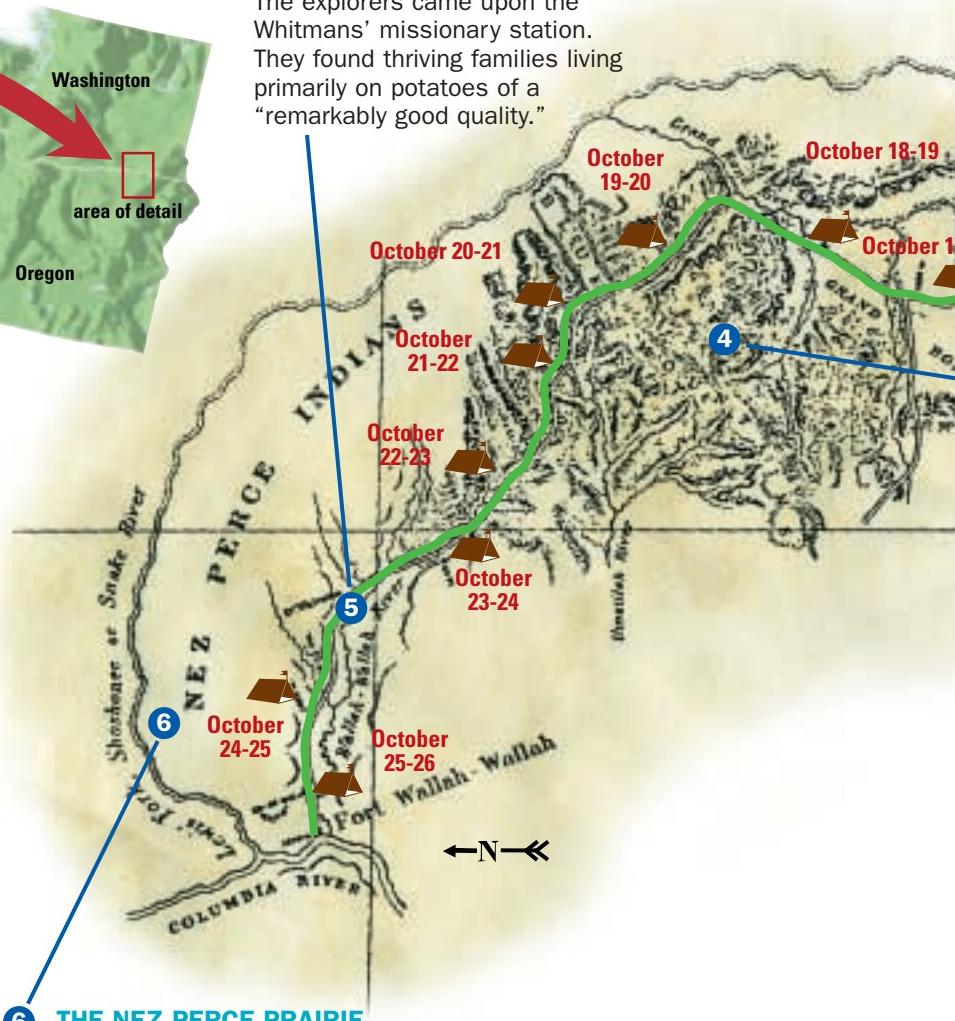
The “Topographical Map of the Road from Missouri to Oregon,” drawn by Preuss, appeared in seven sheets. Though settlers first used this route in 1836, it was not until 1846 that Preuss published his map to guide them. The long, narrow map shown here is called a “strip” map, a map that shows a thin strip of the earth’s surface—in this case, the last stretch of the trail before reaching Fort Wallah-Wallah.

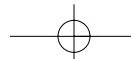
5 THE WHITMAN MISSION

The explorers came upon the Whitmans’ missionary station. They found thriving families living primarily on potatoes of a “remarkably good quality.”

6 THE NEZ PERCE PRAIRIE

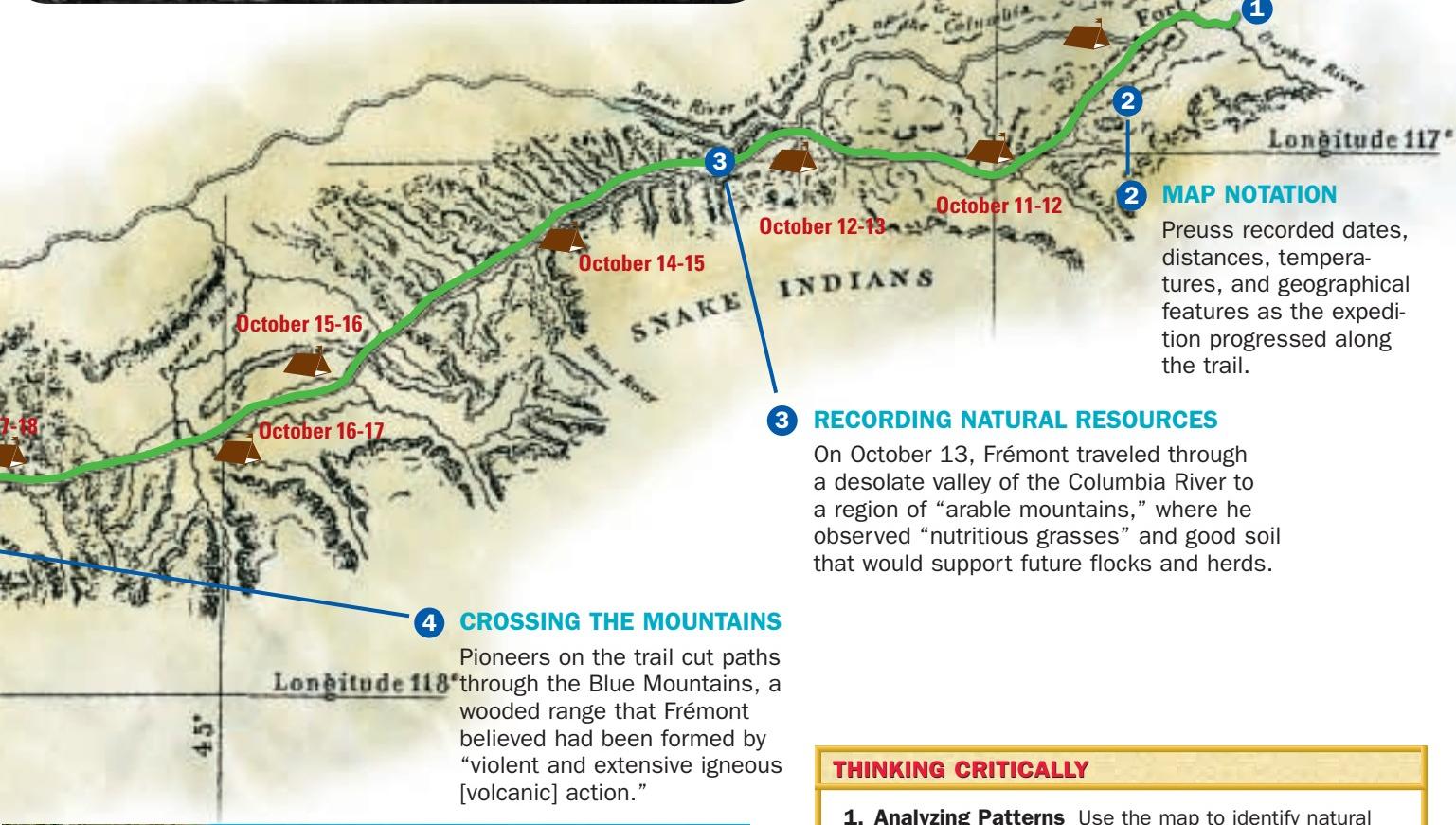
Chief Looking Glass (left, in 1871) and the Nez Perce had “harmless” interactions with Frémont and his expedition.





1 FORT BOISÉE (BOISE)

This post became an important stopping point for settlers along the trail. Though salmon were plentiful in summer, Frémont noted that in the winter Native Americans often were forced to eat “every creeping thing, however loathsome and repulsive,” to stay alive.



4 CROSSING THE MOUNTAINS

Pioneers on the trail cut paths through the Blue Mountains, a wooded range that Frémont believed had been formed by “violent and extensive igneous [volcanic] action.”



3 RECORDING NATURAL RESOURCES

On October 13, Frémont traveled through a desolate valley of the Columbia River to a region of “arable mountains,” where he observed “nutritious grasses” and good soil that would support future flocks and herds.

THINKING CRITICALLY

- Analyzing Patterns** Use the map to identify natural obstacles that settlers faced on the Oregon Trail.
- Creating a Thematic Map** Do research to find out more about early mapping efforts for other western trails. Then create a settler’s map of a small section of one trail. To help you decide what information you should show, pose some questions that a settler might have and that your map will answer. Then, sketch and label your map.

SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R32.



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